

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 11278

FOLLOWING TEL MADRAS 1350 DTD 02 AUG 76 RCVD NEW DELHI
BEING REPEATED TO YOU. QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L MADRAS 1350

JOINT STATE/USIS MESSAGE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, SOPN, IN

SUBJECT: WASHINGTON POST EMPLOYEE JOHN SAAR

REF: A) MADRAS 1335; B) NEW DELHI 11104; C) NEW DELHI 10736

1. SUMMARY: SAAR/NIX CALLED AT CONGEN JULY 30 AND WERE GIVEN OUR UNDERSTANDING OF GOI'S POSITION REGARDING ACCREDITATION. SAAR GAVE APPEARANCE OF A MAN ON AN ASSIGNMENT RATHER THAN A MAN ON VACATION, AND INDICATED HE PLANS SEE NUMBER OF PEOPLE DURING HIS ONE MONTH IN INDIA. SAAR STATED HE HAD BEEN TOYING WITH IDEA OF SEEING GEORGE FERNANDES' MOTHER IN BANGALORE BUT MAY HAVE CHANGED HIS MIND AFTER WE SUGGESTED HE MIGHT WANT TO WEIGH THIS CAREFULLY. SAAR/NIX PLANNED GO FROM MADRAS TO BOMBAY WHERE THEY WERE ADVISED TO SEE ROSENTHAL. END SUMMARY.

2. SAAR/NIX CALLED AT CONGEN JULY 30 AFTERNOON FOR A LONG CHAT, DURING

WHICH I PASSED ON OUR UNDERSTANDING OF GOI'S POSITION REGARDING ACCREDITATION AS INDICATED IN REF C AND EARLIER EXCHANGES REGARDING KAMM/ISAACS. SAAR EXPRESSED HIS APPRECIATION FOR THE INFORMATION,
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SAYING HE IS COMPLETELY AWARE OF THE SITUATION AND RECOGNIZED THAT

THINGS COULD BE PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT FOR HIM AS WASHINGTON POST EMPLOYEE. HE CONTINUED THAT HE IS FAMILIAR WITH THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING LEW SIMONS' DEPARTURE AND SAID THAT HE HAD SEEN SIMONS IN BANGKOK ON HIS WAY TO INDIA. SAAR CLARIFIED THAT HE AND HIS WIFE, WHOM HE DESCRIBED AS A CBS STRINGER, ARE BASED IN TOKYO AND NOT IN LONDON AS USIS LOCAL S. KRISHNAN HAD REPORTED EARLIER AFTER HIS MEETING WITH THEM.

3. SAAR/NIX STATED THEY WILL BE IN INDIA FOR ABOUT A MONTH. WHILE THEY MIGHT SAY THEY ARE VACATIONING HERE, IT SEEMED CLEAR TO ME THAT SAAR IS ON AN ASSIGNMENT AND IS LOOKING FOR MATERIAL. HE APPEARED TO HAVE DONE HIS HOMEWORK WELL AND HE ASKED THE RIGHT QUESTIONS. WHEN HE CAME TO MY OFFICE, HE HAD ALREADY SEEN ONE UNNAMED SENIOR GOVERNMENT SECRETARY IN THE STATE ADMINISTRATION, INDICATED HE HAD BEEN TALKING TO OTHER PEOPLE, AND LEFT MY OFFICE FOR ANOTHER APPOINTMENT. HE SAID HE HAD CONSIDERED TRYING TO SEE KARUNANIDHI BUT HAD DECIDED AGAINST IT WHEN HE WAS TOLD BY SOMEONE THAT KARUNANIDHI WAS UNDER SURVEILLANCE. AT THIS POINT, SAAR INDICATED THAT HE IS A LITTLE NERVOUS ABOUT WHAT HE IS DOING AND STATED HE WOULD HATE TO BE "PICKED UP AND ASKED TO LEAVE," WHICH WOULD SEEM TO CONFIRM THAT HIS PURPOSE HERE IS PROFESSIONAL RATHER THAN PERSONAL. IN ANY CASE, HE THOUGHT IT BEST NOT TO TAKE ANY CHANCES BY SEEING KARUNANIDHI.

HE STATED HE MIGHT TRY TO SEE DMK GENERAL SECRETARY V. R. NEDUNCHEZHIAN, WHOSE NAME I GAVE HIM WHEN HE ASKED FOR THE NAME OF ANOTHER DMK TYPE. I POINTED OUT THAT NEDUNCHEZHIAN MIGHT NOT SEE HIM, BUT SAAR SAID HE MIGHT TRY TO GET AN APPOINTMENT.

4. SAAR ASKED WHETHER GEORGE FERNANDES' MOTHER IS IN BANGALORE AND I REPLIED THAT I DID NOT KNOW. HE SAID HE HAD BEEN TOYING WITH THE IDEA OF TRYING TO SEE MRS. FERNANDES, SAYING SHE HAD WRITTEN TO SOME PEOPLE IN THE U.S. CHARGING THAT ONE OF HER OTHER SONS HAD BEEN BEATEN BY THE POLICE. SINCE "BANGALORE IS SORT OF ON THE WAY TO BOMBAY," SAAR SAID, HE HAD THOUGHT OF STOPPING THERE, MAYBE RENTING A CAR AND DRIVING BY MRS. FERNANDES' HOUSE TO SEE IF SHE IS UNDER SURVEILLANCE, ETC. I TOLD SAAR I COULD NOT TELL HIM WHAT TO DO OR WHAT NOT TO DO, BUT SAID THAT, IN VIEW OF THE ADMITTED DELICACY OF HIS POSITION IN INDIA, HE MIGHT WANT TO WEIGH THIS VERY CAREFULLY BEFORE HE TRIES TO SEE MRS. FERNANDES. HE SEEMED AWARE OF MRS. GANDHI'S FEELINGS REGARDING GEORGE FERNANDES, AND I HAD THE OPINION CONFIDENTIAL

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HE MIGHT HAVE CHANGED HIS MIND ABOUT TRYING TO SEE MRS. FERNANDES THOUGH I BELIEVE HE STILL PLANNED TO GO TO BANGALORE FROM MADRAS.

5. SAAR/NIX SAID THEY WILL BE MOVING ABOUT INDIA AND PLAN TO GO TO BOMBAY WITHIN THE NEXT FEW DAYS. THEY WERE NEVER ENTIRELY CLEAR ON WHEN THEY WOULD ARRIVE THERE, BUT I LATER LEARNED THEY HAD CHECKED OUT OF THEIR HOTEL JULY 31. THEY ASKED FOR NAMES OF PERSONS THEY MIGHT SEE IN BOMBAY AND I SUGGESTED THEY SEE ROSENTHAL. I ALSO

SUGGESTED THEY CHECK WITH HANEY IN THE EMBASSY BUT FOR REASONS NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR TO ME, THEY SAID THEY MIGHT NOT CALL AT THE EMBASSY. SAAR SAID EARLY IN OUR TALK THAT HE HOPED I WOULD KEEP THE FACT HE HAD CALLED AT THE CONGEN "CONFIDENTIAL," PRESUMABLY MEANING HE HOPED I WOULD NOT MENTION IT TO ANY INDIANS. HE ALSO SAID LATER HE HOPED I WOULD NOT REPORT OUR TALK, BUT WITHOUT AWAITING MY REPLY SAID THAT HE REALIZED I WOULD INFORM THE EMBASSY THAT HE HAD CALLED HERE.

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